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Newsletter: Buckley taken to Iran

CIA's Beirut chief was tortured there, report says

By Steve Hagey
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William Buckley, the CIA's Beirut station chief who was kidnapped in 1984 and said to have died after prolonged torture, was secretly spirited through Syria by Iranian gunmen and delivered to Iran for interrogation, according to an Arab newsletter.

The London-based Al Taqir newsletter said Buckley was flown by private jet from Damascus airport in Syria to Tehran less than a week after pro-Iranian Shiite Muslim gunmen abducted him in Beirut on March 16, 1984.

The report, published in April 1985, could not be verified independently.

At the time of Buckley's abduction, the United States described him as a political officer at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut.

Al Taqir said Syrian President Hafez Assad apparently learned of Buckley's secret transit through Damascus only after his arrival in Tehran, and called Iranian President Ali Khamenei to



William Buckley
Reportedly spirited through Syria

ask whether Iran had Buckley.

Khamenei reportedly said that Iran indeed had "a senior CIA man" in custody near the holy city of Qom, but that the man identified himself by the surname of "McCloskey."

U.S. and Mideast sources with close connections to the attempts to free American hostages in Lebanon say the man identified as McCloskey almost certainly was Buckley — and that he was subjected to prolonged torture in Iran to force him to divulge CIA secrets.

Yesterday, the Washington Post quoted U.S. officials as saying the CIA spent a "small fortune" trying to find Buckley, described as the agency's senior terrorism expert and Beirut station chief.

Sources familiar with the Shiite Muslim newsletter said they did not question the accuracy of its Buckley report, which Al Taqir editor Ali Ballout said was attributed to the newsletter's "strong Iranian contacts" in Tehran.

Islamic Jihad, the pro-Iranian group that claimed responsibility for kidnapping Buckley and other Americans in Beirut, said it "executed" Buckley on Oct. 14, 1985. It released an out-of-focus photograph of what it claimed

was Buckley's body, but his body has never been found.

Sources close to the hostage crisis say Buckley, who was 56 when he was kidnapped, is believed to have died in May or June 1985 of pneumonia and other complications brought on by torture and a lack of medical attention.

If they are correct about the time of Buckley's death, it would mean he died at about the time the United States began secretly shipping arms to Iran as part of President Reagan's initiative to improve relations with Tehran and free the hostages.

Sources in Lebanon have said that immediately after Buckley was kidnapped in Beirut, he was driven over the Shouf mountain range and into the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley, handed over to Iranian Revolutionary Guards, taken to Damascus and flown to Tehran in the small private jet of Rafik Mohsen-Dost — Iran's cabinet minister in charge of the Revolutionary Guards.